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First Release

Triple Helix: Film Noir, Neo Noir and Los Angeles – imagining history and remembering the future in the most contemporary city.

Abstract (74 words)

Modern and Postmodern Los Angeles is examined through the lens of film noir and neo noir. The unique relationship between the city of Los Angeles and cinema is discussed in terms of a historiography emphasizing the role played by these defining film styles and genres. The research draws and extends on the work conducted by Edward Dimendberg, Paula Rabinowitz and Mike Davis, and urban theory approaches associated with the Los Angeles School of Urbanism.

Triple Helix: Film Noir, Neo Noir and Los Angeles – imagining history and remembering the future in the most contemporary city.

Introduction

As the contemporary capital of neo noir, Los Angeles is a most definite place, the city so dramaturgically potent it now operates at the level of character in films such as; *Blade runner* (1981), *Devil in a blue dress* (1995), *Heat* (1995), *Seven* (1995), *Strange days* (1995), *LA confidential* (1997), *Mulholland drive* (2001), *Training day* (2001), *Collateral* (2004), *Inland empire* (2006) *Black dahlia* (2007), and the upcoming *Miracle mile* (2008) , to name but a few titles. The postmodern, hybrid genre of neo noir builds on and activates the city's cinematic heritage as the 'dark city', the locus of film noir. In order to understand the entrenched relationship between Los Angeles and both neo and film noir, the paper will examine the classic cycle of noir as a means to conduct a historiography of the city.

Los Angeles – the non conformist

As the LA School of Urbanism through the analysis and writings of Allen Scott, Edward Soja, Michael Dear, Mike Davis, Greg Hise and Darko Suvin have so thoroughly documented, Los Angeles has always stood in stark contrast to the modernist city and ideas described by the Chicago School in the early twentieth century. As the great de-centred, indeed, centre-less city, Los Angeles is the result of polycentric urban agglomerations, and as such, is widely discussed as the physical and spatial embodiment of a fragmented postmodernity. As Chicago functioned in respect to modernity, the history, physical attributes and features of Los Angeles have gone on to embody the essential spatial and urban characteristics of postmodernity.

The history of Los Angeles is a long history of contradictions. As a city, Los Angeles stood in opposition to the modern metropolis and the conventional urban development patterns occurring across the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century. The defining characteristics of Los Angeles made it a stubborn misfit in terms of the modern city described by the Chicago School and its primer, *The City* in 1925. Instead of density, Los Angeles had sprawl; instead of an urban centre it had a suburban de-centeredness; instead of a sense of place, it was populated by domestic US migrants who experienced displacement; and instead of monuments, it had movement. The defining characteristics of Los Angeles which made it such an anomaly in regards to modernity and early twentieth century urbanism have gone on to make it emblematic of late twentieth century urbanism and postmodernity.

In comparison to conventional American urban development patterns at the turn of the twentieth century Los Angeles lacked many of the necessary ingredients for city development. Los Angles was subsequently maligned as the 'sub' urban 'other' to the great American industrial metropolises of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland and Pittsburgh. Los Angeles stands apart from these examples, mostly because, as Mike Davis has charted, the city emerged out of a unique set of geographical, political, cultural and economic tensions that made it the 'great exception.' While many of the development conditions were specific to Los Angeles, as

part of broader regional dynamic operating within California, they also provide an insight into the socio-economic disruptions underpinning American capitalism during its advance westward at the turn of the twentieth century.

As recent Los Angeles histories conducted by writers like Mike Davis and urban planner, William Fulton have discussed, between 1850 and 1920, city development in Los Angeles was controlled by a cabal of elite business interests or "growth barons" as Fulton describes them, who were intent on Los Angeles subsuming San Francisco as the West Coast centre of East Coast capital. The Los Angeles growth barons fervently pursued the development of Los Angeles by seeking imported East coast capital investment partly through a widespread policy of de-regulation across labour, planning and zoning laws. According to Fulton, for the growth barons, that "small group of visionary (and greedy) business leaders…No challenge in (the) task of city-building was too great…Lacking an economy, they invented one".[1] According to urban geographers, Gary Dymski and John Veitch, the economic development of Los Angeles was pursued through land speculation deals and fuelled by haphazard financing schemes. The economics beneath Los Angeles saw the city, "emerg(e) through riotous bouts of speculative excess"'.[2] Up until World War II, these cycles of boom and bust in Los Angeles had been funded by capital investments from East Coast financial institutions upon which Los Angeles had grown dependent for fast tracking industry and economic development of their city.

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century and with some fundamentals in place, the growth barons continued to promote Los Angeles through a distinctly American style of development rhetoric termed 'boosterism', aiming to lure both migrants and investment capital to the city. For over forty years, between 1880 and 1920, the growth barons tirelessly promoted Los Angeles as the 'next big thing' in the narrative of American manifest destiny. Positioned on the edge of the West Coast and fronting the Pacific Ocean, Los Angeles was where unbounded American triumphalism confronted its geographical limit and encountered the final horizon of national and international Westward migration.

> Opportunity – thy other name – Los Angeles…With the thousands of acres of available land, adjacent to Los Angeles, yet to be tilled and developed; land, the productiveness of which California alone can boast, providing a livelihood for the thousands of immigrants to come……with the increasing investments of the thousands of dollars of Eastern and foreign capital…WHO SHALL GAINSAY THE FACT THAT LOS ANGELES IS THE VERY WORD OPPORTUNITY
>
> - Promotion, Arthur Letts Broadway Department Store, 1913. [3]

Letts' poster invokes the boosterism hype around Los Angeles merely to promote a new department store and reveals the pervasiveness of boosterism rhetoric in the mercantile fabric of the city. The paradox belying Los Angeles boosterism at the turn of the twentieth century and masking its proclamations of abundance and opportunity were in fact the city's many absences and lack. The lack of industry; lack of Eastern capital flowing into the city and across southern California; lack of population, and lack of water. What Los Angeles *did* have in abundance were abstractions; the abstractions of 'opportunity;, 'promise;' and, 'the future', all central ingredients of that ultimate abstraction, 'the American Dream'. A key absence in terms of the city's national identity was the

city's lack of conventional urban density the corollary of which was its sprawling suburbs, and in the 1930s this led to the city's famous catch phrase, 'Los Angeles – suburbs in search of a city'.

The Historical Void

Throughout the early to mid twentieth century, another key absence in Los Angeles was the city's own sense of history. Scholarly histories of the city remained in short supply with only two major academic publications between 1946 and 1967. Carey McWilliams' *Southern california: an island on the land*, when published in 1946 had been the first urban history study in over twenty years. The significance of McWilliams' study was the establishment of Los Angeles' reputation as, "the great exception". McWilliams focused on Los Angeles's uniqueness and described it as a region that, "reverses almost any proposition about the settlement of western America."[4] After McWilliams' study it took another twenty-one years until the city would become the focus of another scholarly historical account with Robert Fogelson's, *The fragmented metropolis*, in 1967. Fogelson's study was more comprehensive than McWilliams' and represented the only account of the regions urban evolution between 1850 and 1930. Like McWilliams, Fogelson stressed the uniqueness of Los Angeles: "The essence of Los Angeles was revealed more clearly in its deviations from (rather) than its similarities to the great American metropolis of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." [5]

Since Fogelson's work and the 1960s, many urban history studies of Los Angeles have emerged and recorded how the city represented a growth machine and developed like no other American city in the middle of the twentieth century. In 1912, Los Angeles had a population of 450,000 which was scattered across the five county region comprised of Los Angeles, Ventura, San Bernandino, Riverside and Orange counties. Up until 1920, central Los Angeles had remained stubbornly resistant to the centralising or 'centripetal' drivers of modernity except in the areas of political and municipal concentration of power. The key shapers of modernity, those physical urban attributes that form the hard exoskeleton of other modern cities – railways, skyscrapers, trams, and the urban infrastructure of ports, and industrial zones, are noteworthy more through their absence than presence in Los Angeles. What the city's built environment was renown for as early as the 1920s was the shopping centre, and later, the shopping mall, various regional centres, and by the 1950s, the ubiquitous freeway, the very agency of centrifugal dispersion that would counter density.

In the second half of the twentieth century Los Angeles developed and grew at a record pace. According to Fulton:

> The resulting scale of Los Angeles in the 1960s was so staggering and unprecedented that distinguished urban planners were left speechless. This was no simple hub-and-spoke industrial city, with boulevards and rail lines radiating outward from a central downtown core. It was, in the words of one scholar of the period, a 'fragmented metropolis' – a multi-headed beast with no center.[6]

Driven by its expansionist energies, the regions around the city of Los Angeles have continued to grow and coalesce and now comprise a 21st century megalopolis with some twenty million inhabitants.

The centrifugal forces that shaped Los Angeles throughout the twentieth century gathered momentum in other American metropolises from the 1940s and produced the suburbanisation of the 1950s. As a harbinger of things to come, Los Angeles actually managed to live up to some of its boosterism rhetoric, as it turned out, Los Angeles was the future. Recent promotional discourse that positions Los Angeles as the place where, 'the future is now,' continues into the new millenium. The passage below could have come straight out of Baudrilliard's *America* (1992), but instead, is an advertisement promoting Orange County by the California Office of Tourism. It is boosterism with a very postmodern tone that celebrates simulacra.

> Orange County Los Angeles It's a theme park – a seven hundred and eighty-six square mile theme park – and the theme is 'you can have anything you want'. It's the most California-looking of all California's: the most like the movies, the most like the stories, the most like the dream. Orange County is Tomorrowland and Frontierleand, merged and inseparable. 18th century mission. 1930s art colony. 1980s corporate headquarters. There's history everywhere: navigators, conquistadors, padres, rancheros, wildcatters. But there's so much Now, the Then is hard to find. The houses are new. The cars are new. The stores, the streets, the schools, the city halls – even the land and ocean themselves look new. The temperature today will be in the low 80s. There's a slight offshore breeze. Another day just-like-yesterday in paradise. Come to Orange County. It's no place like home.
>
> California Office of Tourism (2000) [7]

Los Angeles – Hollywood's Blank Screen

In the early twentieth century it was not a conventional industry that arrived in Los Angeles but the beginnings of a new industry, something that, initially, was as insubstantial as Los Angeles itself, a 'Dream Factory', 'Tinseltown'. Architect and historian James Sanders has recounted the impact California had on New York film production once the nascent movie moguls with their soon to be brand names, Zukor, Fox, Goldwyn, Lasky, Laemmle and Mayer, fled west in defiance of Edison's restrictive film trusts. Evacuating the East Coast, the emerging business around moving pictures famously took root in, "a series of quiet Los Angeles suburbs called Glendale, Edendale, Culver City, and, especially, one called Hollywood." [8]

Moving pictures was not exactly the kind of industry the city's business leaders and boosters had been seeking, but by the 1920s, from its scattered and disreputable beginnings, the industry had grown on a scale that exceeded all expectations. According to Sanders, "The West Coast's film industry grew explosively in the space of a single decade; no more than a tiny rival to New York in 1911, it accounted for four-fifths of all American production by 1920".[9] Aside from the employment generated by filmmaking, the physical footprint of the studios also literally filled the vacuum that characterised Los Angeles gaping built environment at the turn of the twentieth century. As Sanders describes them, the "studios were in fact veritable kingdoms, a hundred acres big or more, entirely self-sufficient and literally walled off from the outside world."[10] But as a home grown, indigenous Los Angeles industry, Hollywood was still considered a poor substitute for what other cities had. As Raymond Chandler put it; "Real Cities have something else, some individual bony structure under the muck. Los Angeles has Hollywood – and hates it. It ought to consider itself damn lucky. Without

Hollywood it would be a mail-order city. Everything in the catalogue you could get better somewhere else."[11]

Real cities have 'bones' and Los Angeles has signs. The city's only icon is literally a sign, HOLLYWOOD, perched high above the urban sprawl signalling image over place. Yet through its early association with the film industry, Los Angeles the actual city, was initially, even further displaced. Hollywood captured the American and global imagination not Los Angeles. Heightening the sense of lack and absence that characterised the city were the recently arrived studio backlots. As specialised façade factories, the studio with their backlots specialised in the constant manufacturing of other 'real' cities from as far a field as Casablanca to New York; according to Sanders, "urban films were almost always set in New York, which remained *the* city for Hollywood."[12] Every major studio famously maintained a permanent New York street scene to cater to the number of films set in this 'real Metropolis.'

By hosting Hollywood, Los Angeles provided the settings for other places and other cities, any place except their actual location. Los Angeles was the blank screen that reified other, 'real' cities for cinema audiences around the world. As Pauline Kael once noted, "Los Angeles itself has never recovered from the inferiority complex that its movies nourished…"[13] In 1935, the German geographer, Anton Wagner noted in *Two million streets in southern california,* how the principles of movie set design were incorporated into the "façade landscapes" of Los Angeles. With the arrival of Hollywood, Los Angeles became, in effect, the hollowed out Real, the first physical place to be colonised by the Sign. Displaced by the image, Los Angeles the city was reduced to the lumpen Base of Hollywood's shimmering Superstructure.

Dark Crystal: Los Angeles and Reservoirs of Noir

It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that Hollywood finally began noticing its own backyard, the real Los Angeles of expanding, low lying suburbs that sprawled behind the studio backlots and their fifty foot high flats painted with New York skyscrapers. In the 1940s, it was the advent of film noir that saw Hollywood discover Los Angeles. Providing a context and setting for Los Angeles' unique urbanism, film noir gave form, texture and meaning to those suburbs in search of a city. Yet in stark contrast to the images painted by Los Angeles boosterism, the city that Hollywood discovered through film noir was a dark city, a place that turned sunshine into chiaroscuro and hope into despair. Film noir would articulate the unique version of Los Angeles style existentialism, produced by a city located at the terminus of manifest destiny. As architectural historian Reyner Banham described it in his study, *Los Angeles: the architecture of four ecologies*;

> Los Angeles looks naturally to the Sunset…and named one of its great boulevards after that favourite evening view. But if the eye follows the sun, westward migration cannot. The Pacific beaches are where young men stop going West, where the great waves of agrarian migration from Europe and the Middle West broke in a surf of unfulfilled and frustrated hopes. [14]

The corpus of film noir from the classic period, 1938-1958, now serves as key texts through which to map, interpret and historicise the real city of Los Angeles. In *City of quartz,* Mike Davis constructs a "project of a *noir* history of Los Angeles' past and future," where, as he states, noir has, "…come to

function as a surrogate public history…"[15] Given the gap in conventional scholarly histories between McCarey's work in 1946 and Fogleson's in 1967, the corpus of Los Angeles film noir that spanned 1938 to 1958, offers a de facto, yet vital history of the city that can provide an indirect account of the phenomenology of the city.

Cinema, City, Text and Historiography

As recent analysis conducted by Edward Dimendberg, Paula Rabinowitz and James Naremore has illustrated, film noir in general, has increasingly been positioned as a key mode through which to interpret the entire experience of urban modernity in America. For Dimendberg, in his study, *Film noir and the spaces of modernity,* "film noir…provides a strategy for reading cinema and the built environment as mutually implicated in the construction of common spatial fantasies and anxieties."[16] Just as architecture itself functions as frozen time, a linocut of its moment in history and period of construction, Dimendberg, drawing on Lefebvre, argues film noir's representation of urban space has captured something far more than the city as a narrative backdrop. Dimendberg argues, the urban spaces of film noir;

> …can be both a symptom and catalyst of spatial transformations. By articulating a 'space of representation' in the phrase of Lefebvre, film noir simultaneously registers and inflects the psychic and cultural manifestations of late modernity. [17]

Dimendberg's reading of film noir is echoed by Paula Rabinowitz in her study, *Black and white noir – America's pulp modernism,* (2002). For Rabinowitz, film noir constitutes a historical mode of understanding and cultural sensibility that underpins America's experience of modernity and she interprets its effects far beyond the cinematic realm. Tracing the way in which noir manifested outside of film and crime fiction, Rabinowitz identifies its workings across such diverse areas as photography, feminist literature, documentary, labour films and social work. Rabinowitz's discussion then, "…is less about film noir as a subject of study than as a leitmotif running through mid twentieth century American culture."[18]

Dimendberg and Rabinowitz's re-evaluation of film noir echoes that of James Naremore and his study, *More than night - film noir within its contexts.* (1998). But as asserted by his subtitle, Naremore interprets film noir symptomatically and as product of its multiple cultural contexts. Rabinowitz in contrast, sees noir causally, interpreting "film noir *as* the context; its plot structure and visual iconography make sense of America's landscape and history."[19] Meanwhile, Dimendberg sees the classical period of film noir paradigmatically, articulating, "a tension between a residual American culture and urbanism of the 1920s and 1930s and its liquidation by the technological and social innovations accompanying World War II." [20]

Uniting Dimendberg, Rabinowitz, and Naremore's approach is how each construct noir as a methodological tool to fashion a specific historiography for American modernity. For Rabinowitz it is, "arguing for attention to narrative history – to the history of narratives as much as to the narratives of history – found in the trash of America's popular and political cultures."[21] While Naremore seeks, "A fully historicised account of [noir that] needs to range across the twentieth century imagination, one requiring comprehensive analysis."[22] As for Dimendberg, who seems to have responded to

Naremore's call, film noir is deployed to map the vast spatial discourses of American modernity across the early to mid twentieth century.

Despite often focusing on film noirs set in Los Angeles, Dimendberg does not afford Los Angeles any exceptional status amongst noir's ability to register shifts in the built environment;

> Far from unique to Los Angeles, the transformation of urban structure and the ensuing tension between centripetal and centrifugal spatial modes are pervasive in both the post-1939 built environment and the film noir cycle.[23]

But Dimendberg does acknowledge that Los Angeles, with its many absences and particular lack of a spatial centre, devoid of icons, a skyline and the urban qualities associated with New York or Chicago, became thoroughly conducive to the private eye and hard boiled detective fiction of writers like Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain and Cornell Woolrich:

> As a private investigator, Marlowe is in a privileged position to grasp the social and spatial structure of Los Angeles…In an environment increasingly devoid of a single spatial centre, the private eye functions as a vital surrogate for readers and film viewers, a kind of mobile perceptual centre that links concrete experience with a social and political structure of growing complexity. [24]

Dimendberg highlights how the spatial characteristics of Los Angeles fused with the essential noir convention of the private eye and he reminds us how the city is characterised by both movement and absence, and it is precisely these abstractions that noir rallies in order to navigate meaning.

The specifi-*city* of noir

Modernity may have reconfigured and re-defined American cities like New York and Chicago which then sprouted a new urban topography and accompanying phenomenological experience. But in the case of Los Angeles it was not until the advent of film noir that many of the city's formless absences were reinscribed with a sense of place and possibility, the suburbs, the Bradbury Building and Bunker Hill foremost among them.

> After the first adaptations of Cain and Chandler, film noir began to exploit Los Angeles settings in new ways. Geographically, it shifted increasingly from the Cainian bungalows and suburbs to the epic dereliction of downtown's Bunker Hill, which symbolized the rot in the expanding metropolis.
>
> -Mike Davis, City of Quartz

Bunker Hill, more than any other site in Los Angeles, was memorialised and deified by film noir through its highly dramaturgical function in noirs like, *Act of violence* (1949), *Criss cross* (1949) and *Kiss me deadly* (1955) and its epitaph, *Angels flight* (1965). Yet various other specific locales of the city were also derived from the Los Angeles of the Real and turned into urban iconography by film noir; *Sunset boulevard* (1950), *711 Ocean drive* (1950), *Southside 1-1000* (1950), *Union station* (1950) amongst others. As the resurrection of film noir, neo noir continues this film noir tradition of deriving titles and anchoring narratives in the physical Los Angeles of the Real, *Chinatown* (1974),

Mulholland drive (2001), *Mulholland falls* (1996), *2 Days in the valley* (1996), and the upcoming, *Miracle mile* (2008).

Taking their cue from Los Angeles' indelible association with film noir, Alain Silver and James Ursini, argue for place specificity when interpreting noir and have described Los Angeles as the requisite prenatal site for film noir; "While various, oft-cited film and literary movements, from German Expressionist cinema to home-grown detective fiction, may have helped shaped the rough beast that is film noir, it slouched towards Los Angeles to be born."[25] While Dimendberg and Rabinowitz emphasise noir's ability to offer insights into the breadth and depth of American modernity, Naremore's focus on specificity and context is more reminiscent of the position taken by Ursini, Silver as well as the pioneering theorists of film noir, Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, each of whom examine film noir within a very specific contextual relationship to Hollywood. As Naremore points out, Borde and Chaumeton saw, "Somewhat surprisingly, that European cinema was a 'feeble' influence on film noir and that American noir should be understood chiefly within the "Hollywood professional context".[26] That Hollywood context was the B-movie structure of the studio system, low budgets, the marketing, promoting, type casting and cannibalising of film genres, all of which fused to create the style of film noir and were directly attributable to the Hollywood studio and environment.

Hollywood and the studio environment resides within several Los Angeles suburbs of course, so there are numerous site specific aspects of Los Angeles which effects film production. The physical conditions surrounding Los Angeles regularly permeate and impact the conditions of studio and Hollywood production. The significance of underlining the role of Los Angeles in relation to film noir along side, but separate to, 'Hollywood' – as a system of signifying systems, is a shift in understanding the noir aesthetic as partly derived from the city's unique urban and industrial filmmaking physiognomy, as opposed to, conventional textual influences on noir. Distinctions in the relationship between Los Angeles and Hollywood and their effects on film noir can be traced through the analysis conducted by Sheri Biesen in her study, *Blackout world war II and the origins of film noir* (2005). Biesen documents how the specific war time environment of Los Angeles had direct repercussions on filmmaking and how this reverberated through Hollywood and the studio system. Biesen's discusses the way the city's constant blackouts and resource rationing manifested in specific technical and logistical ways on production processes.

> As the war continued, wartime conditions and material limitations significantly influenced filmmaking practices as Hollywood coped with severe production restrictions by 1941 (escalating through 1942 and 1943). Such constraints necessitated stringent rationing of supplies and film stock, decreased use of lighting and electricity, war-related bans on filming transportation and military facilities, elimination of daytime location shooting in Los Angeles (for security and rationing purposes), air-raid and civil defense drills, dimout and blackout regulations at night.[27]

As is well known with film noir, budget and technical constraints directly impacted its aesthetic and form. By impacting and constraining Hollywood production methods, Los Angeles's war time environment inevitably manifested, in part, in noir's characteristic chiaroscuro mis-en-scene.

Throughout World War II then, Los Angeles, separate to, but along side 'Hollywood,' indirectly imprinted and shaped film noir form.

If the physical and contextual environment of war time Los Angeles contributed to film noir form, then film noir responded by supplying the template for the representation of Los Angeles on screen. Film noirs set in or around Los Angeles like; *Double indemnity* (1944), *Murder, my sweet (*1944), *Blue dahlia* (1946), *The postman always rings twice* (1946), *The killers* (1946), *The big sleep* (1946), *He walked by night* (1948), *In a lonely place* (1950), *The big heat* (1953) and *Kiss me deadly* (1955); exemplified the dark imaginary that is film noir. While there is little argument that these titles are amongst the most poignant examples of classical film noir, they are also the films that enabled Los Angeles to become a space of representation, and marked the city as the locus of American urban experience in the middle of the twentieth century.

The urban labyrinths featured in film noir may have ranged across the American landscape and featured cities from New York to Chicago, San Francisco to Kansas City, and while some of these noirs, especially the New York ones, were periodically shot on location, the majority were filmed in Los Angeles on Hollywood studio backlots . The cities of American film noir comprise, and have been collectively labelled, the 'Dark City', a term that describes the modern American metropolis as it convulsed under modernity and is overrun by crime, vice and desire. But as the writer and film noir connoisseur, Eddie Muller reminds us;

> Dark City, it should be evident…was Hollywood. New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and many other cities, large and small, provided the necessary backgrounds…But the sense of desire and despair, the greed and alienation and the unflinching take on the venal depths of human nature are the product of a specific place, the Dream Factory, and a specific time – the final days of the once powerful studio system.[28]

Hollywood may have constructed Dark cities, but they were always stand-ins for Los Angeles, that real and even stranger place lurking in the shadows that provided the physiognomy of the Dark City. Overlooked for decades by Hollywood while it was busy manufacturing New York and other exotic locales, it was not until the advent of film noir that a cinematic form could articulate the tensions and contradictory aspects of Los Angeles. Nicholas Christopher has described how noir uniquely and variously adapted to Los Angeles in *D.O.A.* (1950), *Double indemnity* (1944) and *Sunset boulevard* (1950), where, "All three are set in Los Angeles…But it is a Los Angeles that is different in each of them – respectively bizarre, seedy, and fantastical.'[29]

The advent of film noir affected Los Angeles unlike any other American city. It signalled Los Angeles as a location city in its own right, not just the home of Hollywood and positioned Los Angeles as 'a place', a city that could endow real and imagined settings and sustain cinematic narrative. Identified and treated as a complex urban locale, film noir erased Los Angeles' one dimensional identity of an orange grove lifestyle destination, an identity constructed to serve the shallow self interest of the boosters.

As the locus of film noir, reel and real Los Angeles remain so intertwined, that as Naremore states;

> To the informed tourist…real places in Los Angeles…seem bathed in the aura of noir: the Alto Nido residence hotel at Franklin and Ivar, just up the street from where Nathaniel West wrote *Day of the locust*; the Bradbury Building…most of all, the Glendale train station at night, looking much more colourful and charming than in *Double indemnity*, where it was blacked out by wartime restrictions on lights. [30]

The particular ambivalence generated by Los Angeles' locales as a result of their noir associations, underscores Naremore's insistence on context when it comes to interpreting film noir. Inscribed variously in terms of the suburban and the urban, where the past, present and future compete as representation only, film noir enables Los Angeles to register as the contradictory site of modernity. Treated as an urban and suburban noir labyrinth, Los Angeles, more than any other single American city, manifests as *the place* where, migratory hopes, an open frontier and opportunity turn into murderous desire - exposing the capitalist price beneath the American Dream.

Conclusion

In the contemporary postmodern neo noir moment of Los Angeles a series of recent scholarly and creative texts continue in the vain of Mike Davis, and seek to explore, and exploit, the unique relationship between Los Angeles and film noir. These texts range from film noir theorists like James Ursinsi and Alain Silver writing *L.A Noir – The city as character* (2005), Elizabeth Ward and Alain Silver's *Raymond chandler's Los Angeles* (1987), to, Thom Anderson's feature length essay film, *Los Angeles plays itself* (2003), and Norman M. Klein's multimedia exercise, *Bleeding through Los Angeles* (2003). The combination of works from film noir scholars, writers and filmmakers extend interpretations on the relationship between film noir and Los Angeles and explore the suture points between the Real and imagined city. As contemporary creative and analytical accounts occurring long after the demise of the original cycle of film noir, these cinematic, print and new media treatments utilise the way film noir performs as a heuristic, self-styled and very local means through which Los Angeles came to *know* itself. Like all neo noir treatments, they also evidence how film noir continues to function as the city's alter ego, the dark mirror that reflects the essential pyschogeography of the city.

By the end of the 1950s, Los Angeles had travelled a long way as a place in the American and global imagination. As the classical period of film noir drew to a close, it had been twenty five years plus since the city had been described as the 'great exception', and stubborn misfit within American urbanism. Constructed as the ultimate Dark City by film noir, and as the place that gave film noir its physiognomy, far from an American oddity, after films like *Double Indemnity,* Los Angeles, in Naremore's view, had become emblematic of a, "dangerously seductive Eldorado- a centre of advanced capitalism…a 'Taylorized'…assembly-line America" [31]

If any city is to be historicised according to its multiple representations on the cinema screen what could be more appropriate than Los Angeles, the city that plays host to the global image factory that is Hollywood. As Alain Silver and James Ursini have stated, "[a]s the city that contains Hollywood, the suburb it annexed in 1910, Los Angeles has a unique position in film history."[32] But the reverse is also true. As it is history and historiography that become uniquely configured, opened up and expanded when Los Angeles is viewed through film history and film noir. Imbricated into the emerging fabric of the city, film noir is the home-grown urban metanarrative of Los Angeles. A film form refracting

the turbulent syncopations of the city's horizontal lived experience into broader cinematic renderings that captured the expiration of the modern metropolis.

END NOTES

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